

F : REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

Appointment of Two Heads of Service

- 1 Philip Dart, Assistant County Trading Standards Officer with Surrey County Council has been appointed Head of Trading Standards and Regulatory Services. Philip will take up his new post on Monday 14 January 2002. Keith Edlington the present post holder retires on Friday 11 January 2002.
- 2 Bob Strong has been appointed as Head of Libraries and Heritage. Bob was Acting Head of Libraries, Information Museums and Archives.

Food Standards Agency Audit Inspection

- 3 We have not yet received the inspector's written draft report but at their final briefing they were very complimentary about the work we have been doing with respect to food and animal feeding stuffs enforcement. They could suggest only one way in which we might improve our method of working and it would appear that ours is the best that these inspectors have found so far.

Community Legal Services Quality Mark

- 4 Following a preliminary examination by auditors the trading standards consumer advice service has been granted the CLS Quality Mark. This recognises the good methods and administrative procedures adopted and maintained by the advice service. A further audit, relating mainly to the quality of advice, will take place in 6 to 12 months time.

False Claims of Electrician

- 5 A plumbing and electrical company was recently prosecuted for making false claims to Buckinghamshire residents regarding membership and approval of an industry body.

- 6 In the company's advertisements it claimed it was a member of, and approved by, the National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting (NICEIC) – an organisation who check and inspect approved members for the quality and safety of their work.
- 7 Complaints were made to Trading Standards regarding these false claims and dissatisfaction with the work carried out. The company was fined £35,000 in total, required to repay customers £5,160 in compensation and prosecution costs of £760.50.

Ofsted Inspection of ConneXions

- 8 In October the newly-formed ConneXions Partnership in Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, was inspected by OFSTED. This was particularly challenging, given that the partnership only formally started at the beginning of April this year!
- 9 Adrian Bell, The Chief Executive of the ConneXions Partnership, outlined the following feedback from the inspection in a letter to the Partnership members:

“The nature of the inspection, as outlined at the outset, was a learning inspection; the OFSTED team were testing their methods as well as there being a recognition that the inspection came at a very early stage in the development of the ConneXions Service. It would therefore be inappropriate for there to be detailed feedback as if this were a full inspection.”
- 10 The inspection team noted the initiative and enthusiasm across the board from the ConneXions staff they met and interviewed. They recognised that there has been a rapid start which has resulted in added value already being demonstrated as a result of the work being undertaken. There is a genuine desire to make the difference that the ConneXions Service represents.
- 11 The Inspectors did recognise the early point of development for the Service and they recognise that although there is some way to go a good start on which to build has been made.

- 12 The partners will be working together in the future to address these concerns, but also to build on the strengths identified by the inspection team.

Libraries and Heritage

- 13 The rollout of the Buckinghamshire People's Network has commenced, with pilot installations in Haddenham and Wendover libraries. Early feedback from library staff and the public indicates a high level of satisfaction with the upgraded IT equipment and much speedier access to the Internet. The People's Network will be officially launched at Haddenham Library on 6 December.
- 14 The one-year CHILDE (Children's Historic Literature Disseminated throughout Europe) project was successfully concluded on 19 October, with an international conference entitled 'Opening the Portal' at Green Park, Aston Clinton. This Buckinghamshire County Library project was developed in collaboration with the County Council's European team, together with partners from four European countries and two UK academic institutes. The conference ended with a very enjoyable reception in the Judges Lodgings, attended by the project partners and Members and officers of the Council.
- 15 The County Reserve Stock in Aylesbury has reopened after a lengthy closure for refurbishment. The old rolling stacks have been replaced by modern, attractive shelving. This stock of over 120,000 older, rare and specialised books, together with special collections such as music and drama, is open to the public during office hours by appointment.
- 16 The project to develop the Centre for Bucks Studies is on target, and a formal opening is planned for February next year.

Draft Waste Strategy for Buckinghamshire

- 17 The Draft Waste Strategy for Buckinghamshire, produced by the Bucks Waste Forum, was subject to extensive public consultation during September and October 2001. The Forum has concluded that existing recycling and composting programmes in the County, even with anticipated growth, will be insufficient to meet the targets now being set by Government to achieve more environmentally

sustainable waste management. The need for new initiatives to recycle and recover energy from waste, and to significantly reduce landfill, will be a constant feature through to 2021 as targets become continually tighter.

- 18 In order to assist me, in finalising the County Council's response to the consultation which is due to be considered further at the meeting of Cabinet at 17 December, I have established a Special Interest Group of Members who have undertaken a series of visits to the existing major landfill sites as well as visiting both Colnbrook and Newton Longville to look at the exciting future proposals to better manage our waste stream. We have also been looking at the challenges which will face both the County Council and District Councils in responding to new government legislation and targets, including the potential significant cost implications.
- 19 Members may also be aware that new European Regulations (EC) 2037/2000 are being introduced from 1 January 2002 regarding recycling of domestic fridges which contain potentially harmful CFCs. Due to the lack of commercial disposal centres across England and Wales, Waste Disposal Authorities will be faced with the need to store fridges until such facilities come on stream. I am therefore urgently looking at the issues this raises for Buckinghamshire.

Unauthorised Encampments by Travellers

- 20 Many members share with me my continuing concern regarding the impact of unauthorised encampments by travellers across Buckinghamshire, which number approximately 200 each year. I am particularly concerned at the different approaches to Police enforcement within different parts of the County and have taken every opportunity to raise this with both local MPs and the Police Authority. Members may be aware that a summary of national research into how enforcement can be handled more effectively whilst complying with Human Rights legislation has just been published. The Government now anticipate issuing new guidance on this to local authorities and the Police in the New Year. I now intend to hold a Countywide Forum to consider the results of this research and discuss ways in which we might improve our own practices and if any potential legislative changes should be recommended to Government as a result.

Countryside Services

Progress on the Langley Park Historic Landscape Project

- 21 Work on the Langley Park Historic landscape Project has been progressing. The project aims to bring forward proposals that will improve the public's appreciation of the historic importance of Langley Park. A round of public consultation was undertaken during September and October. Public exhibitions were held at Black Park and at the Colne Valley Visitor Centre and a questionnaire was widely distributed. The results of this exercise, together with direct contact with members of South Bucks District Council to take this project forward in partnership with them, are currently being fed into the masterplan for the project. It is now anticipated that the bid to the HLF should be ready early in the new year.
- 22 In addition to this project the restoration of the ornamental gates to Langley Park at George Green was completed in September. A grant for £32,000 was secured from the Onyx Environmental Trust for this work. A small ceremony will be organised in the near future to celebrate this work.

Bucks Woodland Forum Annual Conference

- 23 Another successful annual conference for the Buckinghamshire Woodland Forum was organised by Countryside Services on 15 September. An audience of 70 woodland owners, managers and conservationists heard talks given by forestry experts and ecologists on the theme of woodland biodiversity.

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